

. . . Latest Grants To Lyndonville And Newport Agencies Arrive As Congress Debates Whether To Continue REAP Zone Program

Senator Patrick Leahy (D), Senator Bernie Sanders (I) and Representative Peter Welch (D) Tuesday announced \$200,000 in grants to housing agencies based in Lyndonville and Newport that will be used to rehabilitate homes owned by very low-income households, including boosting their energy efficiency for further savings for these families. The grants account for a third of all available grants made nationwide under the program.

The grants come from the Rural Development branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and its Housing Preservation Grant program and were awarded through the Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP) Program. The decade-old designation of the Northeast Kingdom as one of the nation's relatively few REAP Zones makes these grants to the NEK possible.

Northeast Employment and Training will receive a \$100,000 USDA Rural Development grant, to be used with \$100,000 in local funds already secured by the Newport-based agency, to make grants to 30 very low-income households for repair, rehabilitation and weatherization of single-family homes to improve livability standards, and energy efficiency.

Gilman Housing Trust in Lyndonville will similarly receive a \$100,000 USDA Rural Development grant, to be used with \$500,000 already secured from other federal sources to repair, rehabilitate and weatherize 15 single-family homes.

In a joint statement, Leahy, Sanders and Welch said: "The Northeast Kingdom's REAP Zone designation continues to generate long-lasting investments in the region's economy and quality of life. In this round of funding, Vermont received a third of all competitive grants awarded across the country. That is a remarkable testament to the performance of the Northeast Kingdom's REAP Zone in terms of contributing to the region's agricultural renaissance and to creating a diverse economic infrastructure. The REAP Program is making a difference in Vermont, and that is why we will continue the fight to renew its charter as well as the Northeast Kingdom's designation as a REAP Zone."

For Fiscal Year 2012, \$4,167,178 was available for USDA's Housing Preservation Grant Program. A set-aside of \$600,000 was established for grants located in Rural Economic Area Partnership Zones. The funds will be used to leverage public and private dollars to maximize the impact for revitalization and weatherization efficiency of housing that serves lower income residents throughout the Northeast Kingdom.

With the REAP Program's charter about to expire with the current Farm Bill at the end of September, Leahy – the most senior member of the Senate Agriculture Committee and a co-author in creating the REAP program -- is leading the effort to reauthorize the program and has included charter renewal provisions in the Senate's version of the Farm Bill, which passed the Senate on June 21. The House is working on its version of the Farm Bill.

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